



WRIGHTWOOD
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For Immediate Release

So massive in scale it requires two Chicago institutions to exhibit...

The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China
presents epic works of contemporary art
at both the **Smart Museum of Art** and **Wrightwood 659**
February 7–May 3, 2020

45 works showcasing ordinary materials used in extraordinary ways



(Nov. 6, 2019) From gunpowder to human hair, and silk to cigarettes, the materiality of contemporary art from China will be on display in two iconic Chicago neighborhoods this winter. Organized by the Smart Museum of Art in Hyde Park along with Wrightwood 659 in Lincoln Park, ***The Allure of Matter: Material Art from China*** (February 7–May 3, 2020) features 45 two- and three-dimensional works made from a range of unique and humble materials, like melted plastic, paper-thin porcelain, desiccated Coca-Cola ash, and 300,000 iron nails. The works, many monumental in scale, explore how conscious material choice has become a symbol of expression for a number of leading Chinese contemporary artists working over the last four decades. The artist roster includes **Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-Qiang, Xu Bing, Yin Xiuzhen, Song Dong, gu wenda, and Lin Tianmiao.**

The exhibition's opening week is highlighted by a symposium featuring presentations on materiality from scholars and artists, February 6–8, 2020 at the University of Chicago, and a free public celebration from 3:00–7:00pm on Saturday, February 8, 2020, happening simultaneously at the Smart Museum (5550 S. Greenwood Avenue in Hyde Park) and Wrightwood 659 (659 W. Wrightwood Avenue in Lincoln Park). All events at Wrightwood 659 are by ticketed reservation only. More information on the symposium and other opening festivities can be found at theallureofmatter.org.

The Allure of Matter is the first exhibition partnership between the Smart Museum and Wrightwood 659. Too large for a single venue, the exhibition takes up the full gallery footprint of both institutions. It opens twenty years after the Smart Museum's first contemporary Chinese art project with exhibition co-curator and University of Chicago professor **Wu Hung.**

“*The Allure of Matter* brings to the fore an incredible roster of artists who have developed intensely personal connections with unconventional materials. Taken together, the works introduce a broader framework for understanding global contemporary art, which I call 'Material Art' or *caizhi yishu*, where material—rather than image or style—is the paramount vehicle of aesthetic, political, and emotional expression,” said Wu Hung, Smart Museum Adjunct Curator, Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History, and Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago.

“Through their under-studied experimentations and often overlooked use of unconventional materials, the artists featured in *The Allure of Matter* have broken away from past art practices and styles. Their monumental works represent a multifaceted phenomenon that inspires us to ask big questions about our relationship to the everyday material world around us as well as the interrelationship between Chinese art and broader trends in contemporary art globally,” added **Orianna Cacchione**, exhibition co-curator and Smart Museum Curator of Global Contemporary Art.

“Thanks to an extraordinary partnership between Wrightwood 659 and the Smart Museum, the largest exhibition of Material Art ever mounted will be on view in Chicago. Alphawood Foundation is very proud to sponsor Wu Hung’s remarkable exhibition, *The Allure of Matter*, which presents an entirely new genre of fine art—Material Art—as practiced by the most prominent Chinese artists working today. Alphawood hopes this imaginative exhibition, which is presented across the city from south to north, will also provide an opportunity for all visitors to learn more about Chicago and its cultural treasures,” said **Jim McDonough**, Executive Director of Alphawood Foundation Chicago.

The Allure of Matter showcases 45 works which are complementary in form, material, and visual effect. It is divided into two unique halves at the Smart Museum (24 works by 16 artists) and Wrightwood 659 (21 works by 14 artists). To fully experience the exhibition, guests are encouraged to visit both locations. Notably, this presentation of *The Allure of Matter* expands upon the version debuted in spring 2019 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with nine additional works being shown only in Chicago.

Artists

The Allure of Matter features work by Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-Qiang, Chen Zhen, Gu Dexin, gu wenda, He Xiangyu, Hu Xiaoyuan, Huang Yong Ping, Jin Shan, Liang Shaoji, Lin Tianmiao, Liu Jianhua, Liu Wei, Ma Qiusha, Shi Hui, Song Dong, Sui Jianguo, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, Wang Jin, Xu Bing, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhan Wang, Zhang Huan, Zhang Yu, and Zhu Jinshi.

Related resources

Launching in full in early 2020, the **companion website**, theallureofmatter.org, will provide a digital bridge between the exhibition’s two physical halves while offering supplementary content—including original interviews and behind-the-scenes videos and photos—revealing each artist’s working process and personal relationship with their material.

The exhibition is accompanied by a self-titled **catalogue**, the first scholarly volume to examine Chinese art through the lens of materiality. The catalogue, published by the Smart Museum of Art and distributed by the University of Chicago Press, is written by co-curators Wu Hung and Orianna Cacchione, with essays by Christine Mehring and Trevor Smith and additional entries by Susanna Ferrell, Wan Kong, Simone Levine, and Nancy P. Lin.

About

The Allure of Matter is co-organized by the Smart Museum of Art with Wrightwood 659 and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Peabody Essex Museum.

The exhibition is curated by Wu Hung, Smart Museum Adjunct Curator, Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor of Art History, and Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia at the University of Chicago, with Orianna Cacchione, Smart Museum Curator of Global Contemporary Art.

The Smart Museum's presentation of *The Allure of Matter* is made possible by support from Alphawood Foundation Chicago.

Support for the exhibition and its catalogue has been provided by principal sponsors the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and by Lorna Ferguson and Terry Clark. Additional support has been provided by the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation and the Museum's SmartPartners.

Following its debut at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (June 2, 2019–January 5, 2020) and this Chicago engagement, a national tour of *The Allure of Matter* continues at Seattle Art Museum (June 25–September 13, 2020) and the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (November 14, 2020–February 21, 2021). The national tour of this exhibition is supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

Visiting the Smart Museum of Art

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago is a site for rigorous inquiry and exchange that encourages the examination of complex issues through the lens of art objects and artistic practice. Through strong community and scholarly partnerships, the Museum incorporates diverse ideas, identities, and experiences into its exhibitions and collections, academic initiatives, and public programming. The Smart first opened in 1974. Admission to the Smart Museum is always free. *The Allure of Matter* will be on display at the Smart Tuesdays-Sundays, 10:00am-5:00pm; on Thursday evenings, the Smart Museum will remain open until 8:00pm. **The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago is located at 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago. For more information, please visit smartmuseum.uchicago.edu or call 773.702.0200.**

Visiting Wrightwood 659

Wrightwood 659, a private, non-collecting institution devoted to socially engaged art and to architecture, presents three public exhibitions annually. Located in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, Wrightwood 659 was designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect, Tadao Ando, who transformed a 1920s building with his signature concrete forms and poetic treatment of natural light. In a city rich with art institutions and internationally known for its architecture, Wrightwood 659 is designed as a site for contemplative experiences of art and architecture, and as a place to engage with the pressing social issues of our time. All visits to Wrightwood 659 require a reservation. Tickets for *The Allure of Matter* are available, online only, at <https://tickets.wrightwood659.org/events>. During the exhibition, free general admission tickets will be released each Tuesday for the current week. Unless otherwise noted, Wrightwood 659 will be open to the public Thursdays and Fridays, 12:00pm-8:00pm and Saturdays, 10:00am-7:00pm. **Wrightwood 659 is located at 659 W. Wrightwood Avenue, Chicago. For more information, please visit: wrightwood659.org or call 773.437.6601.**

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Cover images

Xu Bing, *1st Class*, 2011, Installation view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Art © Xu Bing Studio.
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